

God's Plan for the Church: Using Your Influence (Ephesians 4:1-16)

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What are the most important roles in the church? Which roles are most vital? Are your answers the same? Different? Why?

A leader is a person with influence. Some people are good influences, some people are bad influences. That is why we talk about good leaders and bad leaders. The local church rises or falls on the quality and consistency of its leadership—the formal leadership structure, and the behind-the-scenes leaders who although unseen make a huge difference. Every Christian has a sphere of influence. Every Christian is a leader for someone.

Look again at Eph. 4:1-16. Paul describes relationships within the church. All are called to the mindset of Jesus (vv. 1-2), seeking unity and peace based on mutual faith (vv. 3-6). Many studies stop at v. 6. Paul continues. Each member has been gifted by Christ (v. 7). Christ has gifted special servants to help the members do God's work (vv. 11-12). When all God's people do God's work together, the entire church is edified, unity is the result, all Christians grow as disciples by knowing Jesus better, and every member grows toward maturity (vv. 12-13). God's plan for the church involves every member exercising influence: "truthing" in love, mutual growth in Christ, supportive relationships, everyone involved so that the church is continually building itself up in love.

Think again about influence. Where do you have the most influence? Some have influence in the worship assembly, but the weekly assembly was only part of the spiritual life of the early Christians. The early church met together in small groups in homes. Why? Because personal influence works best in smaller, intimate gatherings.

Small groups must be more than another Bible study. Small groups are not simply "doing church" again. Small groups are crucial to personalized care and support. Small groups let every person care and support others as God gifts his people—edifying and encouraging one another. Small groups help the connection points work together without friction. Small groups empower all God's people!

One author compared small group gatherings to the huddle in an American football game. The huddles take the most time, but the action happens after the huddle. In most churches, the assembly does not feel like a huddle. (It feels more like the spectators in the grandstands than the players on the field preparing for action.)

In the New Testament, the church is described as "assembly" but it finds its real identity and influence in "going." What happens after church assembly matters as much or more as what happens during assembly. Being an example, seeking and making peace, living out faith, using your gifts, growing spiritually, mutual prayers, caring, counseling, encouragement—these Monday to Saturday activities are the Christian's greatest influence in leading others closer to Jesus. Christians have their greatest spiritual impact in the daily ebb and flow of life. Christians have the greatest impact as they go forth into the world.

You can make a difference! Hard to believe? We usually think that the famous and well-known have the most influence. A simple quiz is currently making the rounds on social media. Name the five wealthiest people in the world in order. Name the last five Heisman trophy winners in order. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress. How did you do?

Think! The people who have made a difference in my life are not those with the most credentials, money, or recognition. They are people who cared, mentored, listened, and loved. Few of us remember last week's headlines. People who are the best in their fields receive applause that lasts briefly.

The quiz continues. Name three teachers who made a difference in your life. Name three friends who helped you in a difficult time. Name three people who are an example to you. I remember people who cared, mentored, listened, and loved – people who were present for me at important points in life, in sorrow and discouragement, in progress and successes. They helped me know who I am, where I belong, what matters most. They talked about what can be and gave me hope.

MAY GOD HELP US LIVE OUT HIS GREAT PLAN FOR THE CHURCH!